

Mech 2651

Chapter 2651: Mounting Pressure

The battle between the Golden Skull Alliance and Task Force Umbra had formally commenced!

The initial volley unleashed by the Charlemagne and its 44 follower mechs struck the prow of the Spirit of Bentheim in a taunted fashion.

"He's mocking us! He's insulting our clan!"

"Don't let this traitor go. Let us prove to everyone that the future of the Larkinsons lies with us instead of this kinslayer!"

The Larkinsons were all in high spirits after Ves riled them up! Every crew member stood ready to respond to any emergency. Every mech pilot sat silently in their cockpits while awaiting their orders.

Of course, the Larkinson fleet did not consist entirely of soldiers. There were many children and other dependents who weren't able to contribute in any way. They had all been moved to the Spirit of Bentheim as a precaution.

The sub-capital ships of the expeditionary fleet weren't safe enough to protect them all. Ves also wanted to move civilians out of the smaller vessels in order to free up other uses for the half-evacuated vessels.

Every combat carrier and every support ship was a potential asset on the battlefield. The survival of these relatively ordinary vessels was not a priority to the Larkinsons.

As long as they won the battle, they could rebuild everything they had lost! To Ves, every ship aside from the Spirit of Bentheim was just a pile of credits. Even if he lost almost all of his entire fleet, it only took a bit of time and money to reform his fleet!

As Ves sat down on his special seat at the rear, a large panorama of projections came to life. Lucky settled on his lap while the long-ranged sensors of the fleet began to glean more details from the closing opponents.

The Larkinsons and its allies had already invested a lot of effort in determining the properties of the enemy carriers. Ves mentally issued a command that summoned a page that summarized the known and suspected attributes of the Fridayman deep strike fleet carriers.

"They truly went big with this attack." He murmured.

All five fleet carriers were important strategic assets to the respective institutions of the Friday Coalition. Losing any of them would definitely cause a lot of pain.

However, if their loss came paired with the death of Ves, then the leaders of the Coalition would probably rejoice!

A rueful smile appeared on his face. "I guess my head is worth more than all of these ships and mechs."

He always liked it when others appreciated him, but he did not like it when the enemy gave him respect. He would rather be underestimated by his enemies, or better yet, not be recognized by them at all. It was incredibly stressful to be on guard against competent and powerful enemies all the time.

In a way, Ves felt a bit relieved that the Friday Coalition had opted to pull the trigger at this time.

Ves knew for sure that this was their last and final attempt to take him down.

Once he surpassed this hurdle, he could completely leave the Komodo Star Sector behind.

What was even better was that Venerable Ghanso had come as well. This was the best opportunity to get rid of the greatest tumor of the Larkinsons. Ves did not want to leave until he was absolutely certain that his least favorite cousin had met his end at the hands of his mechs!

"Come, Ghanso. Let's see who of us shall shape the future of the Larkinsons!"

The start of the battle did not erupt in an explosion. The range was still too far for that.

The infamous Unit L had already ceased fire after unleashing just a single volley. The Larkinsons didn't expose any easy targets for the enemy ranged mechs.

The defending mechs did not stupidly expose their frames in open space. Instead, the Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers all positioned their mechs behind the bulk of their armored vessels.

The only mechs that exposed a portion of themselves to the approaching enemies were the various ranged mechs. They huddled behind purpose-built extensions that the vessels specifically erected to provide the ranged mechs with plenty of cover.

While these ranged mechs weren't as well-protected as bunker mechs, they had gained a lot of defense against frontal attacks!

The Fridaymen were no different. Most of their mechs were out of sight as their huge carriers and smaller sub-capital ships obscured their mechs as much as possible.

They were actually clever enough to deploy their mechs out of sight from their opponents. Even now, the Larkinsons still didn't know which units they faced and how many enemy expert mechs lurked out of sight.

As the range between the two fleets continued to narrow, the calm finally broke to an extent.

"Detecting incoming fire!"

Both sides started to test each other out by firing some modest volleys at each other. While Unit L conserved its firepower, the ranged mechs and the artillery mechs among the attacking force finally opened fire.

Hundreds of energy beams struck one of the combat carriers of the Penitent Sisters!

The beams raked across the hull of the second-class vessel, but none of them managed to pierce through the surface layers.

In response, the vessel started to rotate. While this inconvenienced the rifleman mechs and bunker mechs that relied on her for protection, the rotation caused the subsequent volleys to spread out their damage across a much wider surface area!

Ves and the Larkinsons all remained calm. This was more of a probe than anything else. The Fridaymen gathered valuable data as they tested the response of the Larkinson fleet. Their ranged mechs were also able to examine their own performance and determine whether their weapons required additional calibration.

The defenders soon reciprocated. The ranged mechs and artillery mechs each fired their energy weapons at one of the combat carriers brought by the Praetor Clan.

Colonel Ariadne Wodin ordered the ranged mechs to fire their weapons at half strength. There was no need to stress out their guns in the opening phase of the battle.

"We won't win this battle by taking down the enemy carriers." The projection of Major Verle quietly stated to Ves. "Even if we manage to take down 75 percent of their fleet, their mechs will do us in. We have to wait until our opponents begin their main assault before we can concentrate our firepower on their mechs."

Ves nodded in understanding. "It's a bit frustrating to allow the enemy to close in without beating them back."

The tension in the fleet increased as the defenders nervously awaited the next move of their opponents.

The initiative was firmly in the hands of the enemy strike force. The Fridaymen and their allies had many options at their disposal.

The most important question was whether they would opt to bull through in a straight line or attempt to split up their fleet in order to catch their prey in a pincer attack.

It turned out the enemy leader chose the latter approach!

"Detecting course changes among the enemy fleet! They're splitting up in two diverging elements!"

The Fridaymen opted to separate themselves from the Praetors and Planats. The factions all gave up the advantages brought by concentrating all of their strength and decided they would rather catch their targets in flanking fire.

It took a lot of confidence to make this decision!

By splitting up their forces in two, one of the branches risked getting focused upon.

However, the advantages were equally as great. The Golden Skull Alliance already showed their intention of making as much use of their starships as hard cover as possible.

This meant that frontal attacks would not lead to any decisive results!

The enemy commanding officer evidently wanted to achieve more decisive results. By attacking their targets from two different directions, it became a lot more difficult for the defending mechs to guard against incoming fire from multiple directions!

"I was afraid of this." Major Verle sighed. "This will be an intense and decisive engagement. While their flanking maneuvers will cause them to take additional time to close in, our losses will rapidly mount if they succeed in enfilading us. Only our bunker mechs are protected from attacks coming from multiple directions."

"What will we do?" Ves asked. "Will we split up our fleet as well, or will we focus on one of the two pincers?"

"It's not that simple, sir. For now, we will wait and see. We first need to determine whether the Fridaymen distributed their forces unequally. If we barrel down on the pincer that holds the bulk of the enemy mech troops, then we won't be able to free up enough forces to fend off the other pincer!"

The situation was actually a lot more complicated than that, but Major Verle did not have the time to expound upon all of the tactical moves that both sides could make.

To Ves, the enemy maneuvers complicated the battlefield to an extent. The Larkinsons had no choice but to split up their mech forces in two as well in order to respond to both pincers.

Additional maneuvers might force his mech forces to split up even further. This was not good news to Ves as he believed that his mech pilots performed at their best when they fought shoulder to shoulder with as many comrades as possible.

The false peace did not last long. The pincers didn't take any major detours. They parted from each other just enough to support each other in the event their targets wanted to gang up on one of them. While that meant that attackers didn't gain the best angles against their targets, they didn't waste too much time!

"Their ranged mechs are opening fire!"

The Fridaymen and its allies attacked for real this time! After collecting a lot of data, their fire became a lot more precise!

They targeted the engines of starships, the bunkers where artillery mechs were huddling behind and struck many other targets of opportunity.

At the same time, the mechs that were still out of sight launched tens of thousands of missiles in quick succession!

The missiles initially flew to the sides before slowly arcing in the direction of the expeditionary fleet!

"Intercept those missiles!"

Long-ranged sensors and scanners immediately analyzed the incoming missiles. It quickly became clear that the missiles were very powerful!

The defenders had no choice but to take them down lest the potent payloads inflicted considerable damage to their starships!

Fortunately, the Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers were not weak when it came to this aspect.

Ves keenly paid attention to the performance of his Transcendent Punishers and Valkyrie mechs.

The former employed its positron beam cannons at low power in order to fire them at a rapid frequency. When any of the missiles came close, the heavy artillery mechs activated their rapid-fire secondary pulse cannons.

Though the Larkinson fleet only hosted 350 Transcendent Punishers, their firing rate and accuracy was disproportionately high!

The Valkyrie Redeemers and other Valkyrie mechs performed much worse in this aspect. Their pulse submachine guns were not famed for their range or accuracy. They only made meaningful contributions when the swarm of missiles came close.

Due to the flood of incoming missiles, a number of them managed to reach their targets! They impacted several starships, cracking a considerable amount of hull plating and taking out various surface modules.

While the missiles didn't inflict too much damage in the end, they were a huge distraction which allowed the enemy ranged mechs to attack their targets with impunity!

"How many missiles do they have?"

"They shouldn't have too much left I think! Their fleet lacks a support train, so it's impossible for them to bring too many supplies!"

While the missile swarms slowly petered off, hundreds of powerful shots suddenly hit one of the damaged Penitent Sister carriers!

"The Listener of Athena has lost a portion of her power! She's drifting out of formation!"

"Damn!"

The sudden salvo struck one of his combat carriers with much more strength and precision than he thought! This was absolutely a calculated attack that could only be accomplished by a specialized troop!

"Who launched that critical attack?!"

Soon enough, one of the sensor operators supplied the answer.

"It's a detachment from the 125th Destiny Hammers, one of the famed artillery regiments of the Vanguard Group!"

The first Fridaymen elites had announced their entry into the battle!

Chapter 2652: Elite Mech Units

The Vanguard Group was one of the declining partners of the Friday Coalition. Their prominence was so low that most people in the Komodo Star Sector overlooked their existence.

That did not mean their mechs were weak! While the Vanguard Army was not as large or well-equipped as the Gauge Dynasty, the 125th Destiny Hammers could go toe-to-toe against any Hexer elite artillery regiment!

The Destiny Hammers was an old mech regiment that possessed a rich martial tradition. They piloted exclusive mechs designed by some of the best Masters of the Vanguard Group.

What stood out was their penchant for bombarding their enemies with precise kinetic and explosive attacks!

They loved to hit their targets with hard-hitting projectiles aimed at any possible vulnerabilities. The energy beams they fired before was actually the secondary armament of their heavy mechs!

Just like the Transcendent Punishers, the Destiny Hammer mechs actually allocated much of their capacity to their formidable gauss cannons!

However, unlike the Transcendent Punishers which essentially relied on cheating to inflate their accuracy, the Destiny Hammers relied on pure skill and advanced technology to raise effective hit rate!

As Ves quickly read through the intelligence the Hexers had gathered on the Destiny Hammers, he grew quite concerned.

Even though the Destiny Hammers only 'donated' a couple of mech companies for this operation, their track record suggested that their performance would definitely be disproportionately high!

The Golden Skull Alliance immediately designated the Destiny Hammer mechs as priority targets. The longer the latter were allowed to fire their weapons, the more the expeditionary fleet suffered!

While that applied to every ranged mech unit, the Destiny Hammers were especially threatening in this case!

However, the Destiny Hammers weren't the only threats at range. The enemy possessed a lot of other potent threats.

Unlike the Destiny Hammers who had yet to unveil their best weapons, a different troop persistently achieved great results at extreme range!

Precise laser beams and positron beams struck the various surface modules of every starship in the expeditionary fleet. Even though it was incredibly difficult to achieve consistent results at longer ranges due to various reasons, the ranged mechs sticking close to the fleet carrier called the Orca Tyrant achieved exceptional results!

While the damage to the exposed sensor and communication arrays did not lead to any short-term drops in effectiveness, if this went on, the command and control capabilities of the expeditionary fleet would definitely suffer!

The Larkinsons and Glory Seekers tried their best to identify the enemies that achieved such steady results.

"It's the 219th Witch Slayers of the Puffer Clan!"

It was another famed marksman mech regiment! The Puffer Clan was just as weak if not weaker than the Vanguard Group, but their Witch Slayers had achieved remarkable results in the Komodo War.

Whereas the Destiny Hammers specialized in inflicting as much targeted destruction as possible at medium range, the Witch Slayers excelled at focusing their fire on critical targets at extreme ranges!

They were one of the premier sniper groups of the Friday Coalition. Their record was filled with accounts of turning the tide of battles by assassinating critical leaders or disabling critical hardware!

The formal entry of the Destiny Hammers and the Witch Slayers exerted a lot of pressure onto the expeditionary fleet.

"We have considerably more ranged mechs than the enemy, but our opponents have the edge on this aspect." Major Verle muttered. "Look at the results of our attacks. They're too scattered. Most of our firepower is absorbed by the thick hull plating of their combat carriers. We're not weakening the enemy strike force in any meaningful way except for chipping away at their buffer."

Ves wanted to rub his smooth-shaven chin, but his armored hand bumped against the chin of his helmet.

"Erm, we need to do something. As long as we give the order, our Transcendent Punishers can likely give them a surprise."

Major Verle frowned. "As much as it pains us to lose out on this long-ranged duel, we still need to hold on to our trump cards. From my understanding, our Ylvainan mech pilots cannot maintain their highly accurate state for an extended amount of time. We need to preserve this advantage until we truly need to eliminate our opponents quickly."

Eventually, they decided to keep the Transcendent Punishers on a leash. They were only allowed to fight normally inside their bunkers unless ordered otherwise.

Though Ves privately believed that it was best to cripple the Destiny Hammers and the Witch Slayers at the start in order to curtail their destructive influence, the range was a

bit too long. Even if the Transcendent Punishers achieved quick results, it was far too easy for the elite range mechs to hunker down and weather the storm.

Besides, the two units were hardly the only notable threats the enemy held in reserve!

Ves briefly glanced at another projection. The Cross Clan seemed to focus much of their ire against the Praetor Clan and the Planat Clan. The grudge between the two sides ran so deep that they practically ignored the Larkinsons and the Fridaymen!

While he grew a little concerned at that, it was not a problem for now. The Larkinsons tried their best to identify which elite mech units they were facing while defending against as many incoming attacks as possible.

The good news was that the enemy stopped launching missiles. The bad news was that the missiles had done a good job of drawing out the defenses of the expeditionary fleet.

The enemy likely gathered a wealth of data. They identified the positions of every bunker, estimated the firepower of the heavy artillery mechs that shot down the missiles and gauged the damage resistance of starship hulls.

Few attacks landed on the Spirit of Bentheim. The Friday Coalition already learned that the factory ship possessed relatively high defenses for a non-combat vessel.

The Larkinson fleet did not even attempt any other ships in front of the Spirit of Bentheim. Any attacks that strayed in the direction of the capital ship harmlessly splashed against one of her energy shields.

It took a lot of contracted attacks to overload a heavy-duty shield generator. Unless the enemy was determined to crack open the Spirit of Bentheim, it was best for them to direct their firepower on easier targets.

The sub-capital ships of the expeditionary fleet suffered the brunt of the enemy bombardment as a consequence. While none of the other ships had been crippled yet, they gained increasingly more hull breaches.

The Larkinsons already expected this outcome. It was not as if they held all of their fire.

The combat carriers of the Garlaner clans and the Forward Momentum of the Vanguard Group came under significant fire.

The latter received special attention because she was one of the least resilient fleet carriers in the enemy fleet. While the Orca Tyrant of the Puffer Clan came close, the Forward Momentum received the greatest attention because it held the increasingly more threatening mechs of the Destiny Hammers.

While the Witch Slayers were incredibly annoying, the Destiny Hammers possessed a much greater capacity for destruction!

Sooner or later, the artillery duel would begin in earnest. Both sides were still waiting until they reached their optimal range.

More ranged mechs opened fire from both sides. Aside from the artillery mechs, the other mechs did not fire their weapons at full power. The ranged mechs also controlled their firing rate in order to moderate their energy consumption and minimize their heat buildup.

As the enemy mechs continued to expose their strength, the Larkinsons continually identified more and more units.

The Coalition Reserve Corps brought forward a distinctive unit of medium and heavy mechs.

"The 77th Corundian Giants." Major Verle frowned. "They're specialized in defense. They're also good at steadily pushing lines. The Corundian Giant mechs are noted for carrying multiple shields. While their mobility is low, they can shed pieces of their armor in order to gain a boost in acceleration and agility."

"There's more to them than just their defensive mechs." Ves zoomed in on the live footage of a pair of mechs that practically melded together into a single combination. "Is that a cannoneer mech slotted into the back of a space knight?"

Although Ves had heard about these combinations, he had never seen it in action, let alone be on the receiving end of this unusual tactic!

He continually zoomed in on the Corundian Giant mechs until he confirmed his suspicions.

"The two mechs have truly bound their frames together!"

The space knights of the elite CRC mech regiment boasted an abnormal design. The flight system mounted to their back collapsed and moved to the side. This exposed some kind of mounting mechanism which allowed a specially-designed cannoneer mech to physically slot itself in place!

The result was a very slow-moving combination mech that possessed superior defenses and superior firepower!

In fact, the genius part about this complex maneuver was that the two different mechs were essentially capable of sharing their strengths.

The space knight was no longer a punching bag. Instead, it gained a very powerful helper that was capable of retaliating against any ranged mechs.

The cannoneer mech could fire its cannons without exposing any of its fragile frame. Not only that, but it was able to draw power from its companion mech while dumping a lot of excess heat at the same time!

Of course, the combination's awful mobility left it very prone to flanking attacks, but that was not a concern at the moment!

Ves felt both impressed and intimidated at the fantastic mechs the enemy employed. As a mech designer, he keenly recognized that none of the enemy mechs were weak! Their quality was incredibly high and their performance was guaranteed to be stellar!

"What the? Are those hero mechs?!"

"Huh?!" Ves reacted with surprise.

Hero mechs were not common. They forced too many compromises and demanded more from their mech pilots. Most mech militaries preferred to employ mechs with more defined roles.

When Ves directed his attention to the mechs that stuck close to the Auralis, he became a little more suspicious. The colors of those mechs looked a bit familiar.

"It's the 1633rd Bloody Herons of the Gauge Dynasty!"

"What?!" Ves almost shot up from his seat!

He never expected to encounter a unit from the Bloody Herons!

"What is the matter, sir?" Major Verle asked.

"The Bloody Herons.. are very special. Their mech pilots are all connected to a neural network."

The Bloody Herons was one of Master Huron's handiworks. They were famed for their versatility and exceptionally high coordination!

Their mech pilots overflowed with talent and were proficient in both ranged and melee combat. It was like facing an army of Joshuas who all happened to have gone through a very strict training program that allowed them to meld their minds together in the midst of battle!

During the development of his spiritual networks and battle networks, Ves had performed plenty of research on the elite mech troops that Master Huron had shaped.

The Bloody Herons was one of his greatest success stories! The combination of excellent skill, powerful mechs, punishing training and a brotherhood that was closer to family resulted in many victories against the Hex Army!

Did Master Huron bear a grudge against Ves? He allowed the Gauge Dynasty to commit Unit L to this operation, but also 5 full mech companies of the Bloody Herons!

Ves understood more than anyone else in the expeditionary fleet how exceptional the Bloody Herons could be once they entered the stage. Their powerful and expensive hero mechs hacked down any enemy that came close and fired their rifles at any targets that thought they were safe at range.

While this didn't sound particularly different, the key here was that the Bloody Herons coordinated their actions to an insanely high degree!

What one mech pilot knew, another mech pilot knew as well!

Ves could not allow the Bloody Herons to take over the battle!

Chapter 2653: Heavy Pummeling

The artillery duel soon began in earnest!

The heavy artillery mechs holed up inside the many bunkers placed on the hulls of hundreds of carriers all let loose their heaviest armaments!

The space between the two fleets lit up with a combination of searing beams and heavy projectiles!

The Destiny Hammer artillery mechs securely ensconced on the Forward Momentum silently roared to life! Their gauss cannons did not fire rapidly, but every hit inflicted telling blows to every vessel they struck!

If the elite Fridayman heavy mechs managed to land a direct hit on one of the lighter mechs of the expeditionary fleet, then the latter would certainly be taken out of the fight!

Even though the defenders had not exposed many of their mechs, the Larkinsons assigned to pilot the budget second-class mechs were already shaking in their seats.

The oppression exerted by the Destiny Hammers

was wholly disproportionate to their numbers. Now that they had begun to fire their main cannons, their destructive capacity was beginning to hurt the starships they targeted for real. Hull plating cracked, compartments became exposed to space and all manner of surface components were being swept at an alarming rate.

The Vanguard Group's premier heavy artillery mech regiment fully deserved its stellar reputation!

Ves was already starting to regret his decision to commit the Larkinson Clan to fighting against the Fridayman elite mech troops.

He underestimated the extent in which the Coalition partners invested heavily in these units. By combining superb mechs, exceptionally-trained mech pilots and well-developed martial traditions, the Fridaymen produced an all-round end product that was able to compete against the best of what the surrounding Star Sectors had to offer!

If not for their relatively limited numbers, Ves would have ordered his clan to forget about the fight and abandon the entire fleet except for the Spirit of Bentheim!

There was no way the Larkinson at its height could defeat the Destiny Hammers if they brought their entire mech regiment! Just 80 of their mechs were already chipping away at the morale boost that Ves had managed to instill in his men with his speech.

The worst part of all of this was that the Destiny Hammers weren't even the scariest elites the enemy strike force had in store!

Through direct and indirect observation, the sensor and intelligence personnel slowly identified additional Fridayman elites among the incoming fleet.

The Auralis not only carried a detachment of Bloody Herons, but also hosted the 1002nd Holvein Grenadiers!

The Holvein Grenadiers was a renowned elite mech regiment with an all-round orientation. They fielded many different mech types, allowing them to utilize combined arms to achieve great synergies.

As their name suggested, the Holvein Grenadier mechs were also known for carrying a plethora of grenades.

It didn't matter whether they were swordsman mechs, space knights, rifleman mechs or auxiliary mechs. As long as they wore the colors of the Holvein Grenadiers, they definitely carried at least a couple of expensive grenades with varied effects!

This made them a nightmare to fight against in close range. Whenever the Grenadiers wanted to unleash a surprise, they whipped out a grenade and expertly threw them in a way that dealt the most damage to their opponents!

The grenades couldn't easily be guarded against. Even if their exterior shells all looked exactly the same, they possessed many possible effects. Some of them possessed plain high explosive payloads. Others unleash a shower of plasma. A rare few detonated an intense EMP blast.

While these potent grenades may cost as much as a mech, the Gauge Dynasty continually supplied the Holvein Grenadiers with replacements. This had turned all of their mech pilots into explosion artists!

Anytime the Hex Army encountered the Holvein Grenadiers in battle, the normally-aggressive Hexers instantly suspended all of their plans to push forward. They would rather fight the Grenadiers at range than fight up close!

There was more. The Konsu Clan contributed their elites as well. Hundreds of swordsman mechs trailing close behind the Amagi. The Glory Seekers eventually identified them as the 125th Silent Swords!

This was yet another trump card of the Friday Coalition!

Every mech pilot of the Silent Sword took on a vow of silence. While that did not preclude them from communicating with friendlies in other ways, they rarely did so. Whenever they fought on the battlefield, they relied on their impeccable teamwork and strong battle sense to coordinate with each other and advance in unison.

They were almost just as coordinated as the Bloody Herons, but without relying on any technological solutions such as neural networks!

Due to their extreme diligence and discipline, the Silent Swords weren't only some of the best swordsman mech pilots of the Friday Coalition. They also cultivated minds of steel. The elite Konsu clansmen were so exceptional in this aspect that they were effectively immune against any suppressive glows!

"The Glory Seekers estimate that the Amagi is carrying up to 400 Silent Sword mechs. That's 8 mech companies, sir." Major Verle's projection spoke to Ves on the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim. "The Silent Swords are the shock troops of the Fridayman strike force. The enemy will likely hold them back until our mechs are tired and exhausted from fighting the other elite mechs. Once the enemy commander judges that we have exhausted most of our strength, the fresh and fully-prepared Silent Sword mechs will likely swoop in and roll us up with unstoppable momentum!"

While the Fridaymen might not necessarily employ the Silent Swords in this manner, it was what the Larkinson Clan would do if it was in the place of the enemy.

The Silent Swords were famed for their combat prowess up close, but possessed obvious shortcomings at range. At this stage of the battle, it did not make sense for them to enter the stage.

In fact, the Larkinsons also intended to keep Venerable Dise and the Swordmaidens in reserve for the same reason. The only difference was that there were a lot less of them! Too little time had passed for the Swordmaidens to train up additional mech pilots, so they were only capable of fielding a single mech company at this time.

The huge number disparity depressed Ves. If the Swordmaidens were able to field ten times as much mechs, then he wouldn't be so concerned about the Silent Swords!

As Ves and the other leaders worried about how to fight against the different Fridaymen elites, the soldiers did not think so much.

The ranged mech pilots were all focused on shooting at the approaching threats!

The Transcendent Punishers debuted in battle for the first time. Every bunker on a Larkinson ship featured the purpose-built artillery mechs. Their six thick legs sank deep into the slots of the bunkers. Anchoring the mechs not only brought exceptional stability, but also enabled much more efficient heat transfer.

Four out of six of their heavy cannons fired on a continuous basis. Their positron cannons fired incredibly powerful beams that stripped the layers of anything they struck. Their Xcordon gauss cannons immediately cracked and breached the damaged layers if they managed to land their shots on target!

Taon Melin concentrated fully on his duel against the Destiny Hammers. The higher had commanded the Transcendent Punishers to focus most of their firepower against the bunkers of the Forward Momentum.

It wasn't easy. The Fridayman deep strike carrier may be the weakest capital ship on the battlefield, but her acceleration and agility made it very difficult to achieve consistent hits on a single point along her hull!

The Vanguard Group had cheaped out when it came to cladding the Forward Momentum with armor, but the shipbuilders did not neglect her bunkers. Every shell protecting the Destiny Hammers against external attacks was extra thick!

Fortunately, the Transcendent Punishers were just as secure, if not more.

A volley of heavy gauss rounds impacted the energy shield erected before the group of bunkers that held the Prophet's Fist along with several other Transcendent Punishers!

The energy shields only blocked the initial shots before disappearing, allowing subsequent shots to impact the upper layers of the bunkers!

The bunkers held, if only for now. Despite the lack of thunderous sounds, Taon could practically feel the vibrations as a pair of kinetic rounds slammed onto the protective roof above the Prophet's Fist!

The mech would have been okay even if the bunker succumbed to the attacks. Heavy mechs weren't big and expensive for nothing!

Regardless, Taon couldn't help but regard the Destiny Hammers as his greatest foes. Out of all of the enemy ranged mechs, he instinctively felt he needed to annihilate the enemy artillery mechs before he was free to bring his guns to bear against other targets.

The Destiny Hammers evidently felt the same way because they had concentrated more and more of their fire onto the bunkers of the expeditionary fleet!

After pouring their fire onto the Spirit of Bentheim for a while, the Destiny Hammers eventually directed their fire elsewhere.

This was not because it was impossible for them to inflict meaningful damage against the bunker mechs aboard the factory ship. The enemy artillery mechs succeeded in breaching a couple of bunkers.

The problem was their progress was too slow!

The shield generators that constantly came online for a few moments mitigated a substantial portion of incoming fire. This weakened any attacks directed against the flagship of the Larkinson Clan.

The shield generator operators expertly activated and deactivated the energy shields in order to manage the stress onto their devices. The shields worked wonderfully against lighter attacks but could not bear the burden of blocking too many heavy attacks.

Each time a shield generator came under a heavy burden, they rapidly heated up. Some of their subcomponents also reached their limits. If the shield generator kept blocking more and more damage, they might fizzle out and forcibly enter an emergency cooldown cycle!

Skilled operators and engineers were capable of overriding this necessary cycle if they needed to. The shield generators would then be forced to erect wobbly, unstable energy shields that could still play a critical role at the right time.

This was very dangerous, though! Aside from risking breakdowns and explosions, overloading the shield generators also reduced their lifespans at decades at a time.

The Larkinsons obviously couldn't care about that at this time. The heavy-duty shield generators cost as much as hundreds of mechs, but they were ultimately machines in the end.

If their operators had to push them to their breaking points in order to lighten the burden on the Transcendent Punishers, then so be it. Lives could not be rebuilt as easily as machines!

Through the pure and sacred glow of the Prophet's Fist, Taon felt his purpose. Even without the mech's special ability, he still had Prophet Ylvaine by his side. The passive

glow already expanded his awareness, allowing him to identify the best and most threatening targets he should train his guns on. His accuracy slowly increased as he became more in tune with his artillery mech!

Not every Ylvainan mech pilot was able to reach this elevated state of mind. Their closeness to their mechs might not be as good or they might be unaccustomed to piloting artillery mechs.

Another reason why the Transcendent Punishers weren't able to perform at their best was because of the pummeling they received!

After the Destiny Hammers learned that the Spirit of Bentheim was too well-protected to succumb to their attacks, the enemy artillery mechs trained all of their firepower on the bunkers of the combat carriers instead!

Devoid of shields and boasting thinner layers of armor, the incoming rounds and positron beams made quick work on the bunkers. The accuracy of the Destiny Hammer mech pilots were so high that not even rotating mechs stopped them from concentrating their fire onto individual bunkers!

The first Transcendent Punishers had already fallen when their bunkers collapsed and lots of heavy attacks slammed into their frames!

"This can't go on!" Taon screamed.

The higher ups agreed. Soon enough, the Ylvainan mech pilots finally received the order that they had been waiting for. They received orders to activate the greatest function of their new machines!

Chapter 2654: Ever Forward!

Lieutenant Edmund Corsica of the Destiny Hammers piloted his heavy artillery mech with great proficiency.

Armed with as much as ten energy and physical cannons, the mech expended both energy and ammunition at a judicious rate as it pummeled one of the Hexer-built combat carriers of the Larkinson Clan.

The only downside to carrying so much armament was that the mech was rapidly heating up while expending much of its ammunition and energy!

As the limited ammo reserves of his mech started to bottom out, the hatch into the bunker slid open. A porter mech along with some cargo bots arrived just in time to deliver fresh supplies.

The thick and heavysset mech ceased fire and opened up a rear port that exposed its spent ammunition and energy cell canisters.

Jets of cooling fluids sprayed from the sides of the bunker, causing it to fill up with steam. The artillery mech was already cooling down once it silenced its guns, but the extra cooling measures accelerated its recovery!

The porter mech proficiently removed the depleted canisters and put fresh ones in their place. The mech slapped its heavy palm against the rear port that had just closed.

"You're set! Good luck, Edmund!"

"Keep up the good work, Benny."

As a proud soldier and mech officer of the Vanguard Group, he knew the importance of this battle.

The creator of glows and one of the most influential supporters of the Hexadric Hegemony was aboard the factory ship of the enemy fleet.

Ending the life of the former Brighter known as Ves Larkinson was their primary objective!

The increasingly more intensive engagement took a greater toll on both sides. Starships began to receive crippling damage while various mechs were starting to collapse after being subjected to focused fire.

The duel between the Transcendent Punishers and the Destiny Hammers had become the focal point of the struggle between the Larkinsons and the Fridaymen in the battle.

The latter numbered less, but their heavy artillery mechs were superior on almost every front! Compared to a Transcendent Punisher, the machine piloted by Lieutenant Corsica possessed greater mass, possessed more guns, carried greater armor and incorporated some of the best targeting systems developed by the Coalition!

The Destiny Hammer mech pilots themselves exhibited much greater proficiency than any of their Ylvainan counterparts.

The latter only took up piloting heavy mechs only recently. What was even worse was that the Ylvainan mech pilots were barely accustomed to piloting second-class mechs.

Lieutenant Corsica and his comrades were different. They attended the best mech academies of the Vanguard Group and committed to an artillery track early on. They spent many years learning the ins and outs of the various skills needed to utilize the most advanced functions of artillery mechs.

The Destiny Hammers was made up of the best graduates that came out of these mech academies. Once they entered the elite mech regiment, they weren't allowed to pilot one of the powerful machines right away. They had to spend years polishing their marksmanship and control abilities before they were even ready to pilot the advanced heavy artillery mechs!

All of the effort put into their training paid off. Edmund and his comrades exhibited as much as 50 percent greater accuracy!

Their superior marksmanship compared with all of the technical assistance provided by their mech inflicted methodical, controlled destruction onto their targets!

And this was despite the fact the Forward Momentum was slowly spinning along her length!

It was much harder for the Destiny Hammers to keep their aim consistent while their firing platforms constantly moved, yet mech pilots such as Edmund Corsica considered it routine.

In fact, it was not necessarily bad for the individual mechs to lose line of sight for a time.

Not only did it spoil every attempt made by the enemy to breach their bunkers, the maneuvers also granted the Destiny Hammer mechs precious time to cool down their rapidly-heating mechs.

If there was one notable flaw to their mechs, it was that there was no way to avoid excessive heat generation!

This was a rule that every artillery mech designer had to grapple with. More firepower always generated more waste heat due to lots of energy being converted to one form or another. The Destiny Hammers happened to love their guns a lot, so it was a given that all of their artillery mechs boasted a multitude of guns, allowing them to output a huge burst of damage in a very short time!

While that made them very great at penetrating armor and fortified positions, their mech pilots constantly had to keep track of the condition of every single cannon as well as the rest of their mechs.

A flood of data continued to flow back and forth between Lieutenant Corsica and his familiar machine. Normally, he wouldn't fire his guns so rapidly, but the critical nature of this battle left him and his fellow Destiny Hammers with little choice.

If they failed their crucial mission, then dying was the least of his concerns. The Vanguard Group was already one of the underdogs of the Komodo War. If he couldn't stop the menace of glows right now, then the Coalition partner that Edmund regarded as home might not be able to last!

"Ever Forward!" Edmund cried out the motto of the Vanguard Army!

"EVER FORWARD!" His comrades echoed!

As several more combat carriers and bunkers succumbed to their weight of fire, he and his Vanguarders already knew in advance that they were destined to win this artillery duel.

Their enemies were too bad. Whoever the Larkinsons put into the cockpits of their admittedly-decent artillery mechs were still too green!

The large number of misses, the lack of focus, the inability to adjust to spinning starships and so on all pointed out that the Larkinson artillery mechs were amateurs who were way out of their depth!

"Well, it's not as if I expected more from these third-raters." Edmund contemptuously muttered.

Now that he gained a measure of his opponents and their equipment, his mech began to inflict greater destruction. He already knew how to dismantle the standard hexagon-shaped bunkers that the Hexers favored in as little time as possible.

Just as his guns along with the guns of the rest of his squad transformed an enemy artillery mech into a piece of scrap, the enemy fire abruptly abated for some reason.

Lieutenant Corsica looked puzzled. "Have the enemy artillery mechs overheated?"

It shouldn't be. The enemy mechs fired their cannons at a slower rate and more sustainable rate. As someone who knew artillery mechs well, Edmund instinctively felt as if the enemy was preparing something big.

Of course, that did not mean the Destiny Hammers were willing to abide by the rhythm of their opponents. Their cannons kept launching powerful beams and solid rounds at their targets without interruption. Just like their battle cry, once they attacked, they never stopped until they completed their mission!

Just as Lieutenant Corsica succeeded in felling yet another combat carrier together with his comrades, the enemy artillery mechs that possessed clear firing lines all fired their primary armaments at the same time!

"What?!"

Over 800 positron beams and gauss rounds hit over a dozen different points along the hull of the Forward Momentum with practically no deviation in aim!

The attacks shouldn't have been able to shake a capital ship, yet the deep strike fleet carrier somehow vibrated just enough to affect Edmund's artillery mech's aim!

Shortly afterwards, the cooling fluid being sprayed onto the mech ceased to flow!

"What happened?!" He demanded.

"The enemy salvo managed to pierce through the hull of the Forward Momentum! Several sensitive compartments and power lines are damaged. We are doing our best to restore the knocked-out systems, but it will take time!"

Just as the mech lieutenant pondered over the coordinated strike, the enemy artillery mechs unleashed yet another devastating salvo with their kinetic weapons!

This time, Lieutenant Corsica flinched as numerous kinetic rounds slammed into the bunker above his artillery mech!

What was remarkable was that the rounds all hit the port where his third primary gauss cannon was poking out. While half of the powerful gauss rounds cratered into the solid surface of the bunker, they nonetheless created an opening that just happened to allow another gauss round to rip right into the barrel of his third gun!

"Ahh!"

The Destiny Hammer artillery mech jerked as both its third and fourth gauss cannons were instantly knocked offline due to the direct attack!

"Impossible! How can they be so precise all of sudden?!"

Lieutenant Corsica wasn't able to ponder this question too much. The earlier attack had just blasted apart an entire weapon mount, causing his mech to incur significant damage to a side!

While his mech was too big, tough and heavy to let the damage affect the functioning of the rest of the mech, Edmund still felt concerned!

"Why didn't they fire their positron beams?"

Just a second later, the enemy responded!

Over a dozen beams struck the gap in the bunker! Just like before, a number of hits went slightly wide as there were too many variables at play.

Yet despite all of these conditions, at least five full-powered positron beams managed to thread the needle, causing them to hit straight onto the already-damaged portion of Edmund's mech!

"Ahhh!"

More portions of the stricken mech incurred heavy damage! What was even worse was that the heat levels of the machine rose rapidly, causing the mech to lose its ability to fire its cannons and slowing down its responses.

Lieutenant Corsica's heart beat faster and faster. Once might be a coincidence. Twice was deliberate. What if the enemy artillery mechs fired a third time?

"Damn! I need to withdraw back into the ship while waiting for my mech to cool down!"

He quickly asked permission to withdraw from his captain, which was granted right away.

"Pull back and stabilize the condition of your mech." His superior told him. "Emergency repair bots are already on their way, lieutenant!"

"Roger that!"

While Edmund tried his best to withdraw his mech as quickly as possible, this was not exactly a quick process. Due to the extensive anchoring between his artillery mech and the bunker, it normally took at least 20 seconds to lift the legs of the mechs out of slots built into the deck.

In fact, the mech lieutenant estimated it would take twice as much time due to the damage sustained by his mech as well as the extreme heat affecting the performance of many components.

"Too slow!"

Barely seven seconds passed after Edmund had begun the laborious withdrawal process before the enemy artillery mechs struck yet again.

This time, over two-dozen gauss rounds and positron beams precisely struck the damaged and partially-damaged roof of the bunker.

The previous attacks that failed to enter the gap had weakened the structure just enough for the third and final salvo to collapse the roof entirely!

Even if heavy mechs were notoriously famed for their ability to keep going despite sustaining a lot of hits, the enemy attacks weren't light at all! The positron beams softened up the surface layers of the exposed mech while the gauss rounds slammed through and transferred an immense amount of destructive kinetic energy onto their target!

Lieutenant Corsica was unable to think any longer. He didn't even have time to cry out the battle cry of the Vanguard Army, nor think about his two young sons that he was leaving behind.

His life passed in an instant as the attacks collapsed his cockpit, crushing his body into bloody mush!

In just three salvos, the Larkinson artillery mechs managed to fell 20 percent of the Destiny Hammers taking part in this battle!

The Forward Momentum bore dozens of scars as various bunkers and surface components were blasted apart. More critically, a lot of maneuvering thrusters had been struck as well, thereby impairing the fleet carrier's ability to adjust her course and make it difficult for enemies to target specific sections!

Despite these sudden setbacks, the Destiny Hammers did not back down. The surviving mechs fired their weapons just as intensively as before. They were determined to pay back their losses tenfold!

"Ever Forward, men!"

"EVER FORWARD!" The surviving Destiny Hammer mech pilots echoed!

Chapter 2655: Cruel Destiny

The Larkinson Clan's artillery fire abruptly changed in pattern.

Previously, the Transcendent Punishers fired their cannons at a brisk rate of fire. Due to their relatively low hit rates, the mech pilots attempted to increase their chances of inflicting meaningful damage by outputting as many attacks as their mechs were able to bear.

Yet once they received the command to draw upon the Great Prophet's blessing, they no longer fired their weapons in a scattered manner.

Every bunker that hosted a Transcendent Punisher gained a holy atmosphere. As mech pilots such as Taon Melin opened their minds to Prophet Ylvaine, they actively felt the object of their worship responding to their prayers.

"Prophet, guide my aim!"

Over three-hundred Ylvainan mech pilots simultaneously entered into a different state of mind. Pure devotion welled up in their minds as their devotion was clearly being rewarded!

Inside the Prophet's Fist, Taon felt as if he had gained a completely different view of the battlefield.

When the glow of his artillery mech had become more active, its sensors seemed to supply him with additional information.

The Forward Momentum's secrets opened up to him and his fellow mech pilots.

He intuitively learned that attacking a specific section on the starboard side would disrupt the power flow to the surrounding bunkers.

He also learned that one of the bunkers on the fleet carrier was incorrectly maintained. If he concentrated his fire on the left side of the oval roof, he could weaken the entire structure.

"This!"

None of his practice sessions with the Prophet's Fist ever yielded so much information to him. This was completely new as far as he was concerned. Was he able to read the weaknesses of the enemy because his connection to the Great Prophet was closer than other Ylvainans?

Whatever the case, he had to share what he learned!

This was not difficult. Through the man-machine connection, he transmitted his inexplicable insights to the command network after packaging them into a condensed form.

Due to his special identity as the chosen of Zeal, the Ylvainan mech officers took his contribution seriously.

They had no doubt in the data supplied by Taon. To the Ylvainans, faith and devotion trumped logic and skepticism!

"We have developed a list of priorities based on the observations you have made with the Prophet's blessing." A mech captain spoke. "Every Transcendent Punisher will be allocated a set of targets. We must strike hard and make our attacks count. Do not let the Bright Martyr down and do not fail your purpose!"

"We stand ready to exact the Prophet's punishment!"

The Prophet's Fist received a data transmission from the Spirit of Bentheim that precisely outlined its targets.

Taon no longer sought to glean more details from the Forward Momentum but instead brought the cannons of his mech to bear against the aft section of the enemy capital ship.

The Forward Momentum wasn't making it easy for him to keep his guns on target. The ship slowly spun around like a giant drill, which made it very difficult for ranged mechs to focus their fire on a single section.

Before, that would have inconvenienced the Ylvainan mech pilots. Now, their aim remained true. While they still employed their own aim along with the aid provided to them by the targeting systems of their mechs, they received additional assistance from what must be the Prophet himself!

"Fire!"

The Transcendent Punishers fired once. The Forward Momentum immediately shook and drifted off-course for a fraction a second as numerous important systems ceased to function as normal!

The Prophet's Fist adjusted its frame after firing its primary armament. While it could have fired another shot after its weapons recovered, it was not yet the time to do so. Taon had to go down the list of targets and bring the guns to bear on a bunker that was intermittently visible as the enemy capital carrier did not stay still.

It didn't matter. He trained his guns on a specific set of points ahead of where the Forward Momentum traveled and tried his best to stay on target.

Seconds passed until the next order came.

"Fire!"

The moment Taon pulled the trigger, the Prophet's Fist silently boomed as its pair of positron cannons and gauss cannons unleashed their power again.

The points where he happened to be aiming at just happened to be occupied by one of the bunkers of the Forward Momentum!

The Prophet's Fist's attacks along with the attacks of several other Transcendent Punishers managed to drill a hole right through one of the gun ports.

"Fire!"

When Taon fired once again, he already knew the results of his attack. Without any surprise, he observed the already-damaged bunker collapsing and exposing a ruined artillery mech into space!

This was far enough. There were still many more Destiny Hammer mechs that were continually trying to make up for their losses.

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

"Fire!"

The Transcendent Punishers continued to maintain their uncanny high accuracy. More and more bunkers collapsed while the Forward Momentum exhibited more problems due to losing an increasing amount of subsystems.

While the capital ship was too massive to be taken out so easily, her bunkers were another matter!

With at least two-hundred Transcendent Punishers focusing their firepower on twenty bunkers at a time, every few salvos continued to fell a lot of Destiny Hammer mechs at a time!

As confident as the Destiny Hammers were in their own strength, they finally sensed that something was very wrong once they lost an entire mech company after just a handful of exchanges!

"We've lost half of our men!"

"How is the enemy able to target us so precisely?! I thought the Larkinsons didn't have any mech pilots who could match our skill!"

"What kind of nonsense intelligence is this!? How can religion possibly play a role in a matter like this! This report is pure fantasy!"

The soldiers of the Vanguard Group smelled something very wrong about this change. If this went on, the Destiny Hammers assigned to Task Force Umbra would probably be wiped out in short order!

"Evade the enemy attacks! Move the Forward Momentum behind the Auralis! Let the other fleet carriers become our shields!"

The Forward Momentum actively broke formation and slowed down in order to let the other fleet carriers overtake her. Once the other capital ships had passed her by, the vessel quickly hid behind the large and formidable bulk of the Gauge Dynasty's capital ship!

General Vander Pierce became furious! The Vanguarders acted on their own accord without even bothering with the decency to ask for instructions first! Not only that, they completely shamed themselves by drawing themselves back to the rear of the fleet!

"Ever forward, indeed!"

As much as he wanted to reprimand the Vanguarders, the leader of Task Force Umbra forcibly pressed down his rage. While his authority was technically absolute, the forces he led were composed of several different units that belonged to several different factions within the Coalition.

They weren't united enough to let go of their selfishness!

Even though the Forward Momentum managed to take shelter behind the Auralis, it was already too late for the Destiny Hammers. They lost 64 precious heavy artillery mechs!

Of the surviving 16 mechs, several of them sustained significant damage that heavily impaired their performance.

While the Destiny Hammers were still capable of influencing the course of the battle with the firepower they managed to preserve, they were no longer a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield!

This was especially so because the Destiny Hammers lost all of their mech officers and veterans! For some unknown reason, the Larkinson artillery mechs prioritized all of their attacks on the machines piloted by the most authoritative, skilled and experienced mech pilots.

The ones who were left were all in their thirties and possessed significantly less skill than their older colleagues!

Back in the Larkinson fleet, the Ylvainan mech pilots each felt satisfied with what they had managed to accomplish. The Destiny Hammers may be better than them in many ways, but the Ylvainans had gods on their side!

With the blessings of the Great Prophet and the Bright Martyr, Taon and his fellow devout mech pilots actively channeled the fury of their faith! They continued to mete out targeted destruction at other exposed targets.

At this time, the Orca Tyrant became their target of choice. The Puffer Clan's fleet carrier was not as weak as the Forward Momentum, but she was also slower and more sluggish.

It didn't matter if the Orca Tyrant possessed a thicker shell. With hundreds of Transcendent Punishers achieving an effective hit rate in excess of 80 percent, no

amount of alloy plating could withstand the combined impacts of hundreds of positron beams and gauss rounds!

Despite the longer distance, the Witch Slayer mechs which were using the Orca Tyrant as their cover experienced great difficulties. Dozens of fragile marksman mechs collapsed in an instant as their positions came under sudden bombardment! The lack of warning and simultaneous attacks gave the mech pilots no time to react before sections of their mechs blasted to pieces!

Over a third of the Witch Slayers had been slain in just a couple of salvos! The rest of the marksman mechs did not dare to snipe at the Larkinson fleet anymore and withdrew until they were hovering directly behind the Orca Tyrant's bulk!

All in all, the Transcendent Punishers expended a lot of effort to take just over a hundred ranged mechs. Yet despite felling so few mechs, the oppression exerted by the enemy strike force had reduced by over half!

While the ranged mechs of the other elite mech units weren't bad, they did not excel in ranged combat unlike the Destiny Hammers and the Witch Slayers. The latter two mech troops differed from the others by their ability to make their attacks count!

Now that they had been diminished and suppressed, the expeditionary fleet gained a lot more momentum during this battle phase!

Taon slowly let out a deep breath as he exited out of his elevated state. He felt the presence of the Great Prophet receding from his mind and mech. While his Prophet's Fist still possessed it's reassuring glow, he still longed to return to his previous state.

"I can't." He shook his head. "I need to be prepared to face the subsequent wave of enemies."

They only managed to dismantle a portion of the enemy strength. The Fridaymen and their helpers brought around 6000 mechs in total. The Transcendent Punishers and their Ylvainan mech pilots could not afford to exhaust themselves too early. Even the Great Prophet himself felt a little weaker than before to Taon!

"The fight is far from over."

The Prophet's Fist and the Transcendent Punishers opened fire again.

Back on the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim, Ves sighed as he saw the results of the outburst of the heavy artillery mech he designed.

"What a splendid performance." Major Verle's projection smiled just after he issued a set of orders to others. "Your Transcendent Punishers exceeded my expectations. They are truly an evolution of your remarkable Deliverer designs."

"Thank you, but do note that there is a limit to this special state." Ves warned. "Every benefit has a cost. Every process consumes energy. We need to make sure to reserve enough strength to survive the next phases of the battle."

"Indeed. It is almost time for our fleets to approach medium range. This is the phase where many rifleman mechs will shine. Melee mechs will take to the field as well."

What Major Verle didn't state was that the enemy expert mechs would probably make their moves as well in the next phase!

Ves could practically feel Venerable Ghanso's hostility from this distance. Once the main body of the enemy strike force entered the fray, the battlefield would become a lot more chaotic!

He gripped the Larkinson Mandate tighter. He could feel Goldie's concern. Larkinsons were already dying at a steady rate. Many more would die as the battle progressed!

Chapter 2656: Old Survivors

Two different fleets were locked in struggle!

Task Force Umbra along with extra forces dispatched by the Praetor Clan and the Planat Clan barreled down onto the Golden Skull Alliance's fleet with hatred driving them onwards.

The Fridaymen hated the Larkinsons and their leader!

The Praetors and Planats resented the Crossers!

Much of the excitement that took place in the beginning phases of battle centered around the Komodans. The result of the artillery duel between the Transcendent Punishers and the elite ranged mech troops of the Friday Coalition had far-reaching effects.

Despite involving a relatively small quantity of mechs, the clear advantage secured by the Ylvainan artillery mechs left them free to train their prodigious firepower against the advancing carriers and mechs of the opposition!

That did not necessarily mean that the thousands of other Fridayman ranged mechs were incompetent. They just excelled in a different form of combat. They placed less emphasis on long-ranged precision and more on medium-ranged suppression and skirmishing.

The rifleman mechs of the 1002nd Holvein Grenadiers, 77th Corundian Giants and other elite mech regiments numbered much more than the contingent of 125th Destiny Hammers and 219th Witch Slayers.

Yet much of their laser beams and gauss rounds slammed ineffectually against the thick hulls of the opposing starships.

While the damage onto the Larkinson vessels kept accumulating, the lifespans of the targeted combat carriers in question did not diminish fast enough!

Even if the combat carriers finally succumbed under all of the weight of fire, their destruction accomplished little else besides robbing their owners of a bit of cover.

Escape pods launched towards the rear minutes before the vessels drifted out of control or ruptured when their structure was methodically torn apart.

Billions of pieces of debris flung in each direction as other starships exploded as critical power reactors or other volatile components reached critical levels!

Not every evacuating crew member managed to make it back to the Spirit of Bentheim.

Plenty of escape pods were shot down by errant attacks or deliberate shots.

Deadly debris could also shred the vulnerable shells keeping their occupants protected against the hazards of space.

Sometimes, escape pods arrived at the flagship of the Larkinson Clan intact, only to deliver a corpse as an intense burst of radiation turned its occupant dead!

The battle was becoming more and more tragic as the range between the two fleets continued to shrink!

As destruction rained down on both sides, a group of expert pilots gathered together in the hangar bay of the largest capital ship on the battlefield.

The Hemmington Cross was at least a kilometer longer than the Spirit of Bentheim. The fleet carrier was also considerably thicker, though that came at the expense of mobility and other properties.

The ship endured significant attacks from the beginning. The Praetors and Planats had focused much of their firepower on the pride of the Cross Clan, but their bombardment only resulted in surface damage.

The ship may not be as well-armored as other fleet carriers, but she was still a vessel built for war!

It was not a problem for the huge vessel to endure the firepower outputted by thousands of enemy mechs for an extended amount of time!

If that wasn't enough, the Crossers also adopted the same tactic as the Larkinsons. Numerous combat carriers flew in front of the Hemmington and used their considerable bulk to block the enemy from compounding the damage inflicted onto the Crosser flagship!

Of course, the Crossers did not have much luck in felling the enemy capital ships either. Both the Praetors and Planats had committed one fleet carrier each to this operation.

The Praetors had dispatched two different capital ships. The first one was the Vindicator 35, a fairly average fleet carrier with a total capacity of 500 mechs. Despite her lack of strengths and weaknesses, the Vindicator 35 was a versatile and useful capital ship that served the Garlener clan well.

The second fleet carrier was even bigger. Capable of carrying 700 mechs, the Palmis Crislin was almost just as ludicrous as the Hemmington Cross. She also happened to possess the same faults as her armor and mobility were not very good.

The Planat Clan dispatched just a single capital ship. Compared to the other capital ships, the Soaring Eagle performed below average, reflecting the relative weakness of the Planat Clan. Capable of holding 450 mechs, the Soaring Eagle was a fleet carrier that was past her time. Her aging hull may still be serviceable in contemporary battles, but she was destined to be replaced at any time!

If the two clans of the Becker Tribe only brought these capital ships, then the Crossers would have gone on the offensive by now. Yet the clans that had turned their coats had also brought 51 combat carriers, though several of those vessels were already taken out of action!

Both sides knew that this was just the prelude. They had clashed many times after the Cross Clan lost its warlord and ace pilot. They roughly knew what both sides were capable of. As clans who used to be part of the same tribe, the intelligence they possessed on each other mechs, starships and mech pilots was still relevant.

The Crossers knew that they were the disadvantaged compared to their opponents, but they were already used to these circumstances.

Different from before, the Cross Clan now gained the confidence to reverse the expected outcome!

Patriarch Reginald Cross proudly stood before three other expert pilots. All four of them exuded aggressive force of wills. Despite their nature, they peacefully existed alongside each other.

The battles the Crosser expert pilots had been through had forged an undeniably close relationship between them. These seasoned warriors wouldn't have been able to make it out with the remnants of the clan if they didn't learn how to trust each other's backs.

"The traitor clans have made a very grave mistake this time." Reginald grinned. "They only dispatched a portion of their forces. We weren't able to beat them when entire mech divisions hounded our tails, but now that they have brought less than 4000 mechs, we stand a good chance of crushing our current opposition!"

The other expert pilots looked fired as well. Many Garlener tribes and clans had all conspired to tear the Cross Clan apart. The Praetors and Planats had behaved especially reprehensible because they had switched their allegiances to the enemy as soon as the Cross Clan no longer possessed its invincible momentum!

"The two traitor clans must not be doing so well back in what remains of the Becker Tribe." Venerable Linda Cross, an older and grizzled female expert pilot surmised. "While we aren't privy to the details of the peace treaty brokered by the Empire, the Praetors and Planats are probably more on guard against their neighbors than us. We are little fish compared to the giant sharks that are swimming right next door."

Just because the traitor clans switched over to the side of their former enemies didn't mean they were buddies now. The Billard Tribe and the Chardon Tribe still harbored great suspicion and greed towards the remaining territories of the Becker Tribe. The Praetor Clan and Planat Clan had to keep as much of their strength at home in order to guard against any untoward actions.

Venerable Banner Cross, another old expert pilot, frowned. "Perhaps the Praetors and Planats have already put us out of their minds. They succeeded in preserving their clans at the cost of our own. In our current state, we pose no threat to them anymore."

"What do you think, Imaris?" Reginald asked.

The fourth expert pilot let out a weary sigh. "We are already beaten. We used to rule over entire star systems. That time is past. We have been reduced to a single fleet, and a diminished one at that. I wish.. I wish.. we could have saved more Crossers. I still mourn for our expert pilots. They were too young to sacrifice themselves during our retreat."

A heavy mood descended over the gathered expert pilots. Their force of wills grew calmer as the four old expert pilots painfully recalled the desperate flight that caused them to lose so many comrades.

One of the biggest tragedies of their initial flight from Vicious Mountain was that they lost all of their younger expert pilots!

None of the Crosser expert pilots that survived to this day was younger than 50 years old. Those with brighter futures and greater talent had all met their end prematurely as they gave up their lives to hold back the enemy expert mechs.

Patriarch Reginald's force of will suddenly grew intense as he raised his fist!

"We can't tear down the traitors entirely today, but we must not let their dishonor go unanswered! We must not let our descendants grow up hearing that we have fled Vicious Mountain like craven rats. We must beat our enemies today if only to regain our honor and build a better future for the subsequent generations of our clan! Let us smash the traitors and let the entire Garlen Empire know that the Cross Clan can still earn glory!"

The expert pilots all boarded their mechs. Even though they weren't actively developed anymore, the expert mechs were all formidable in their own right.

The only Crosser expert pilots who survived up to this point were all strong, experienced and tricky without exception!

Venerable Linda Cross was a space knight specialist. With a piloting career spanning over three decades, she and her expert mech were countless times more formidable than Venerable Jannzi Larkinson and her Shield of Samar!

Venerable Linda's expert mech, the Amphis, was a formidable medium space knight that boasted unparalleled defense but also considerable offensive capabilities.

The most notable weapon system on the Amphis was its compact shoulder-mounted laser cannon arrays. Able to output 6 powerful laser beams at the same time, the Amphis was capable of suppressing powerful enemies or wiping out many weaker opponents without needing to close the distance!

Venerable Banner Cross was responsible for providing more powerful ranged solutions. The Leskin, his expert rifleman mech, was armed with a special heavy multi-rifle that was able to output many different types of damage. The Leskin was also incredibly fast and mobile, allowing it to outpace every other expert mech aside from lighter machines!

The oldest surviving Crosser expert pilot also happened to pilot the fastest expert mech in the possession of the Cross Clan. Venerable Imaris Cross may be over 80 years old, but his slightly-declining reflexes was still good enough to pilot the Conavis Mer, a very agile light skirmisher. Even if Imaris fumbled for some reason or another, his expert mech's formidable active and passive ECM systems had always managed to rescue him from a difficult situation.

As for Patriarch Reginald Cross, his expert mech was the most formidable and most valuable expert mechs of them all. He boarded the cockpit of the Bolvos Rage, a hefty medium hybrid mech that possessed a myriad of close and medium range solutions!

The Bolvos Rage's most formidable weapon was an axe made out of mysterious exotics and other materials. The weapon did not possess any special gimmicks, but it didn't need any. The axe was both hard and sharp, allowing the Bolvos Rage to hack through most shields in a single blow!

The hybrid mech also carried a shotgun. The weapon was notable for its huge threat against other expert mechs. It was capable of firing specially-manufactured pellets that was very effective in exhausting resonance shields!

The only downside was that the defection of its high-ranking mech designers left the Cross Clan with no means to produce additional shotgun shells.

The Crossers had lost the formulas.

Patriarch Reginald had already requested Professor Cortez to reconstruct them or develop a viable alternative. That would take time, however, so the expert mech only had a limited amount of shells at its disposal.

The Bolvos Rage actually integrated several other weapons and modules in its frame. The high-tier expert mech surpassed the narrow specializations that the local mech community favored. Hardly any enemies knew what to expect when they faced the expert hybrid mech in battle!

Patriarch Reginald Cross briefly closed his eyes before fury entered his gaze!

"Our time has come. Let us launch and meet our old enemies!"

Four glowing stars rocketed out of the hangar bay of the Hemmington Cross and formed up in front their fleet!

Chapter 2657: Combination Mechs

Thousands of rifleman mechs entered the fray in earnest!

As the two fleets entered medium range, the hit rate of rifleman mechs shot up quite considerably! They were able to land hits on vulnerable ship modules and even distant mechs on a reliable basis.

This has caused the two fleets to incur damage at a considerably greater rate than before! While the amount of ships that were put out of action did not increase that quickly, many ships were still bearing a lot of new scars as the huge volume of fire steadily diminished their overall durability!

Of the two sides, the expeditionary fleet possessed a slight advantage.

Although the quality of the mechs of the Larkinson Clan was inconsistent, their superior numbers along with the survival of much of their artillery mechs allowed them to exert a lot of pressure on their opponents!

Ideally, the Larkinson Clan wanted to prolong this state as much as possible. Without the intervention of the Destiny Hammers and the Witch Slayers, the Transcendent Punishers outputted so much siege damage that none of the Fridaymen fleet carriers felt very good!

Though the mech pilots of the Transcendent Punishers weren't very accurate now that they had put aside the Great Prophet's blessing, at this range they didn't need too much skill to methodically demolish the bunkers on the enemy ships.

With dozens of Transcendent Punishers focusing their fire on individual bunkers, it didn't matter if most of their shots went wide!

The damage inflicted onto the sections next to the bunkers not only affected the functioning of the artillery mech inside, but also compromised the integrity of the bunker structure.

As long as the Transcendent Punishers kept up their heavy attacks, the bunkers they targeted went down sooner or later!

Of course, the Fridaymen did not let the Transcendent Punishers go unanswered. The rifleman mechs of the Corundian Giants, Holvein Grenadiers and several smaller units all brought their firepower to bear on the threatening bunker mechs.

"Don't let those ranged mechs shoot at our artillery mechs for free!"

The Vima Suns of the Larkinson Clan . As a budget second-class rifleman mech, the Vima Sun was a relatively fragile and basic machine that was designed with energy weapons in mind.

Though the mech was not that impressive, they were very good in performing their primary purpose, which was outputting a lot of damage. Otherwise, Ves wouldn't have chosen to acquire a lot of copies of this model.

As an added bonus, the Larkinson Clan supplied the Vima Suns with modified laser rifles that were upgraded with luminar crystals and some other components. This allowed the Vima Suns to inflict as much damage as midrange mechs, though not without a few limitations.

Sadly, as much as the Vima Suns were successful in suppressing a lot of enemy rifleman mechs, they weren't as good at taking damage!

Their relative lack of armor was doubtlessly a calculated tradeoff meant to keep them light and affordable. They were ordinarily supposed to rely on hard cover to shield them from damage. If that wasn't possible, then they needed to depend on their decent mobility to remain elusive.

Right now, the Vima Suns did not need to resort to the latter. Even if the enemy strike force split up in two different splinters, it would take a lot more time before they caught the expeditionary fleet in a vulnerable position.

This meant that the battle at range was only going to keep tilting in the favor of the defenders!

General Vander Pierce was well aware of this development. Pain and frustration welled up in his body as he witnessed the results of the artillery duel. The Witch Slayers could still contribute to the battle once they no longer became a priority target, but the Destiny Hammers were pretty much done for in this battle!

"It appears we'll have to resort to harder measures." He muttered.

Ideally, he would have liked to lean more on his ranged mechs to carry the fight. That would have resulted in less casualties and a cleaner victory.

It was not to be. With the Fridaymen absorbing a lot of damage, they were on a time limit.

At the general's command, the melee mechs as well as the expert mechs made an appearance!

As soon as thousands of additions emerged in open space, the Transcendent Punishers, Vima Suns and other Larkinson mechs instantly changed their targets!

Rather than wasting most of their firepower on cracking bunkers and disabling starships, it was much more meaningful to take out as many enemy mechs as possible!

"They finally couldn't hold back any longer!"

A handful of elite Fridaymen mechs already exploded as a torrent of focused attacks impacted their frames and bombarded the space around them!

The true lethality of the Transcendent Punishers was on full display at this moment as their heavy cannons were much more effective at blasting through the much-thinner armor plating mechs than penetrating much heavier layers of starship hull plating!

The only problem was that mechs were much more elusive targets in space. The formidable Fridayman mechs did not float like sitting ducks. Instead, they immediately accelerated forward and to the side in order to close the distance to the enemy.

Only by getting close would the Fridaymen be able to render the Transcendent Punishers useless! The advancing mech pilots possessed great confidence in their melee combat abilities. This was Task Force Umbra's strong point!

As the Larkinson Clan and its allies directed much of their firepower against the advancing enemies, around 6 mech companies of the Corundian Giants deployed in earnest.

Their unique space knights formed a large and dispersed wall in space as they slowly advanced to a flanking position.

A matching number of cannoner mechs flew behind the space knights as the latter already started to bounce away positron beams and gauss rounds.

Once the space knights accelerated for a long enough time, their flight systems parted in half and exposed an open slot on their backs.

The cannoner mechs all flew forward and expertly mated themselves to the backs of the space knights.

The cannons wielded by the ranged mechs mounted on top of the shoulders of the defensive mechs. The shields carried by the latter automatically changed their configuration so that they still provided adequate protection while not getting in the way of any of the guns!

As soon as the Corundian Giant mechs completed their merger, their formidable cannons began to fire a variety of physical and energy attacks!

While their fire was not particularly precise, their damage was very considerable!

When the Transcendent Punishers attempted to train their firepower onto the Corundian Giants, they encountered a lot of unexpected surprises.

The combination mechs outputted an energy shield that was powered by both mechs, thereby making them stronger than usual!

If the energy shields had been breached, then the high-quality physical shields carried by the space knight was very effective in mitigating a lot of damage.

Even if the Transcendent Punishers concentrated their fire, their target would just rely on their limited mobility to fly behind another combination mech, thereby saving them from further damage.

This was just the start. As the Larkinsons continued to fire at the weird combination mechs, the Corundian Giants employed more tactics to reduce the damage they incurred.

For example, the combination mechs merged together into a giant shield wall that was able to replace individual elements if they ever came close to collapsing.

While this tight formation left them vulnerable to explosive attacks, the mechs collectively outputted an energy shield that was far stronger than what any individual mech could support!

If any of the shields wore out, then the mechs in question slowly withdrew from the front and quickly returned to the Eager Condemnation to pick up a replacement shield.

Since the shields did not take up a lot of space when stacked together, the CRC fleet carrier had brought hundreds of spare shields that each took a lot of effort to breach. As long as the space knights of the Corundian Giants withdrew fast enough, they would be able to keep rotating several times!

The same went for their powerful cannoneer mechs. Their potent firepower was paired with limited reserves. They were forced to return to their fleet carrier to replenish their spent supplies and reduce the heat that they had built up by launching a lot of attacks.

While these constant rotations significantly hampered the Corundian Giants, the elite mech pilots were already accustomed to this. The space knights were able to continue to redirect a lot of firepower onto their intact defenses while the cannoneer mechs were able to maintain a high firing rate without holding back.

The mech pilots knew that as long as they kept this up, hardly any of their mechs would fall! They would be able to keep up their numbers over the course of a battle and outlast any enemy in the end. This approach worked especially well against impatient Hexers who were eager for quick successes!

On the bridge of the Spirit of Bentheim, all of the bridge officers and operators looked unprecedentedly serious.

The battle was rapidly heating up! With the appearance of thousands of mechs on both sides, it was clear that a decisive confrontation was at hand!

Captain Vraken stood in the center of the bridge and directed the crew of the factory ship like they were extensions of her own body. She kept track of every single detail and issued precise instructions that prevent compartments from getting breached and shield generators from getting overloaded.

At this battle, the renowned starship captain fully proved she deserved to be the captain of a great capital ship!

While the grand captain did her best to minimize damage to the Spirit of Bentheim while keeping her relevant on the battlefield, others did their part as well.

The Hexer trainers who had originally been assigned to help the Larkinsons take control of their vessels took matters into their own hands. As the Larkinson crew members found themselves out of their depth during a battle, the incredibly competent Hexers calmly took charge and commanded the respect and obedience of every clansman!

In the rear of the bridge, Ves continued to pay attention to the battle while keeping an eye on the changing sentiment of the bridge operators.

Major Verle, who was physically stationed in the CIC on the 37th deck, had less time to spare on talking to Ves. The increasing scope of the battle forced him to spend more time on moving many more pieces into place.

His projected form only occasionally brought something up with Ves.

"These Corundian Giants are too troublesome." The former Vandal officer shared his frustration. "Not even our Transcendent Punishers are able to exhaust them. They're just too tough."

Ves nodded in agreement. "Their designs are very advanced and their combination tactics are highly effective. All of this must be costing the Coalition Reserve Corps a lot of money, but that doesn't appear to be a concern in this case."

"The only way to take down these infernal combination mechs for good is to fight them up close. If the Penitent Sisters or the Swordmaidens manage to reach the Corundian Giants, then the combination mechs cannot effectively defend against flanking attacks!"

"The enemy won't allow us to do that." Ves grimaced. "The Fridaymen and their helpers have brought plenty of other mechs that can block the approach of our forces."

"There's also the expert mechs to consider..."

As the regular mechs of both sides were about to confront each other, the expert mechs did not stay behind!

Eleven glowing mechs emerged from the ranks of the enemy mechs. The Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers couldn't help but feel a lot of pressure from the appearance of so many expert mechs.

The enemy attempted to shock the Golden Skull Alliance by unveiling all of their expert mechs at the same time!

Even though the defenders already received advance warning, the impact was still substantial! Morale immediately dropped as the reality of facing so many expert mechs at the same time put everyone's courage to the test.

"Do not falter! We have our own expert mechs!"

Five dazzling mechs appeared from the forces of the expeditionary fleet. While their numbers were much less, their appearance nonetheless stopped friendly morale from sliding further.

Over four thousand standard mechs fell behind the expert mechs of the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan.

"We are not alone!"

Chapter 2658: Warmonger

The intervention of the Corundian Giants did not fundamentally solve the disadvantages of the attackers at range.

As much as the protected cannoneer mechs were able to fire at their targets while enjoying the protection of their paired space knights, their damage output was quite limited compared to a true artillery mech.

The Transcendent Punishers were able to inflict three to four times as much damage. They did not have to deal with as many logistical limitations as well, allowing them to do their jobs in a much more sustained fashion.

The attackers decisively ordered their mechs forward. Thousands of melee mechs from both pincers flew forward with rifleman mechs following close behind.

The eleven expert mechs brought by the enemy also followed suit. Their movements already made it clear that the expert pilots intended to support their regular counterparts.

It was too bad that their opponents had different intentions in mind.

Patriarch Reginald Cross scanned the enemy battle lines inside the cockpit of the Bolvos Rage. His powerful expert hybrid mech was surrounded by a boiling red glow that reflected the repressed fury of its pilot.

The Bolvos Rage was an expert mech designed to exact retribution upon the enemy!

His time would come soon.

He completely disregarded the enemy standard mechs. He held little interest in what passed for elites in the Komodo Star Sector. Their long centuries of peace severely curtailed the Friday Coalition's ability to put all of their theories to the test. Virtual combat against other soldiers from the other parts of the galaxy could only teach so much.

As far as the Crossers were concerned, the Fridaymen were still playing at war!

"Their expert pilots aren't that much either." Reginald scoffed.

Although the distance between the two forces was still too far to resolve too many details about the enemy expert mechs, from what he could sense, the Fridaymen did not bring out their best for this battle.

The glows surrounding the eight mechs flying close to the Fridaymen elite mech units were less radiant. Reginald had heard that the Friday Coalition had resorted to employing third-rate expert pilots as their guest expert pilots. He immediately suspected that all 8 Fridaymen expert mechs were piloted by foreigners.

"A state that has stagnated in peace can't even rely on their own mech pilots." Imaris Cross contemptuously remarked over the communication channel. "I can smell the ineptness from these third-rate expert pilots. They aren't accustomed to their recently-issued expert mechs."

Expert pilots had a way of sensing whether other pilots were fully in tune with their mechs. The fluency of movements, the frequency of mistakes and the delay in actions were all telling signs to those who truly knew what it was like to pilot a powerful mech.

So far, the Crosser expert pilots were not impressed by their opposition.

Venerable Linda Cross examined the mechs rather than their pilots.

"Their expert mechs aren't even all that good aside from a couple of exceptions. They're basic and their materials are probably middling at best. The Fridaymen must have been unwilling to expend too much strategic reserves on these extra expert mechs."

"Don't look down on them too much." Patriarch Reginald sobered his mind a bit.

"Respect their numbers if you can't respect their quality. Even we may fall into a losing trend if any of us have to fend off two mediocre expert mechs at the same time."

"That's what our helpers are for." Banner Cross said as his Leskin gestured at the thousands of mechs backing them up. "As far as numbers are concerned, we enjoy an absolute advantage!"

Of course, much of the Glory Seeker and Crosser mechs might fall at the end of the day. There was no way the enemy expert mechs would go down without a fight!

Still, as far as the Crossers were concerned, they could mop up the Fridayman expert mechs at their leisure after they took care of their true opponents.

The traitor clans knew quite well that the Cross Clan still retained a handful of powerful expert pilots.

The Praetors and Planats couldn't just send anyone to confront the likes of Patriarch Reginald Cross, who was rumored to be close to advancing to ace pilot!

"I see some old friends have come." The Cross Patriarch grimly spoke as the identities of the Praetor and Planat expert mechs became clear. "Our foes aren't as green as their Fridayman colleagues."

The Planat Clan dispatched just one expert mech, but it was a powerful one.

Reginald made an impulsive decision and attempted to hail the sole Planat expert mech.

Despite all of the interference produced by all of the explosions, weapon discharges and flying debris, a basic communication channel still came into shape.

"Damira." Reginald greeted. "So you've come to finish the job, eh?"

The enemy middle-aged female mech pilot sighed. "For what it's worth, I disagreed with the decision made by the top. We should have fought against the Billard Tribe and the Chardon Tribe until the end. Instead, our elders decided that you Crossers aren't worthwhile friends and comrades-in-arms anymore. Saint Hemmington Cross burned a lot of bridges while he was alive."

Reginald's fury suddenly spiked!

"My father has always treated you Planats well! All of those complaints about the supposed injustices your clan has suffered at the hands of my father are pure excuses. He never neglected the rest of our tribe!"

"Hahaha!" The Planat expert pilot laughed. "You are incapable of recognizing the faults of your tyrannical father. Sure, he rewarded us for our contributions in battle. Sure, the Saint allowed us to grab a decent chunk of conquered territories. Yet that wasn't enough for him. He had to keep going. He had to keep fighting. We were barely finished with burying our dead before your gloryhound of a father pushed us into another war!"

"We had to take advantage of our momentum. We can mourn and rest at any time, but we would never be able to make so much progress if we stopped our conquests midway."

"Your warmonger of an ace pilot completely lost sight of the cost of his victories!" Venerable Damira Planat accused. It seemed her patience was wearing thin! "Do you know the truth behind your Saint's death? We Planats and our fellow Praetors had enough of you Crossers. We didn't want to go down in flames with the rest of you, so we decided to jump ship ahead of time."

Patriarch Reginald's eyes widened as shock started to overtake his fury. "Are you saying.."

"Hehehe." Venerable Damira seemed to enjoy this conversation. "We didn't collude with the Billard Tribe and Chardon Tribe, if that's what you were wondering. No. We did something much simpler. We simply kept track of the positions of their ace mechs and steered Lord Hemmington Cross towards them. I've heard that it was so easy to lead him around the nose because he was always looking for more targets to attack!"

"THIS IS UNFORGIVABLE!" Reginald roared!

The Bolvos Rage burst out in red as its resonance glow intensified! Patriarch Reginald could not handle the supposed truth behind Saint Hemmington Cross' demise!

Red suffused the expert mech's vision as he only had Venerable Damira Planat's expert mech in his sights.

He knew her expert mech well. It was an impressive melee mech with a set of complex transformable melee weapons. They could shift in many different forms according to what Venerable Damira liked to wield in a situation.

Back when the Cross Clan and the Planat Clan were part of the same tribe, Patriarch Reginald had the pleasure of fighting alongside Venerable Damira several times.

She piloted a weapon master mech, which was a special type of melee mech.

He witnessed her incredible mastery in wielding swords, axes, spears, halberds and many other weapon types.

What was even more impressive was that Venerable Damira often changed the shape and configuration of her transformable weapons at a very high frequency.

In one blow, her opponent might be blocking a sword, only for it to transform into an axe that wrenched the shield aside by hooking onto its edge. In another split second, that axe might morph into a spear that instantly stabbed into exposed mech!

This was only the simplest sequence. The Erin Tear was capable of executing millions of permutations!

Anyone who fought her up close would constantly have to be on guard against sudden transformations.

Though Lord Reginald might not be the best expert pilot to face the Erin Tear, he no longer considered all of these matters. He ignored every other factor on the battlefield including his fellow Crosser expert pilots and concentrated all of his fury on the expert mech of the Planat Clan.

His honor demanded that he must defeat Venerable Damira Planat and her Erin Tear in person! He would not rest until his Bolvos Rage chopped its axe straight through the cockpit of the expert weapon master mech!

"YOU MUST REPAY YOUR TREACHERY WITH YOUR BLOOD!" He roared!

The Bolvos Rage accelerated forward like a searing red comet!

"Hah!" Venerable Damira Planat grinned. "If you want to harvest my blood, you have to get past my weapons first! Let me put you down like the rabid dog you are. I will exterminate the remnants of your pathetic clan after this fight!"

Her Erin Tear shot forward like an orange sun!

Venerable Damira was not afraid of her old battle comrade! Even though Patriarch Reginald Cross was considerably stronger than her in terms of resonance strength, she was supremely confident in her chances!

The actions of the two expert pilots triggered the others into moving forward as well!

The Amphis, Venerable Linda Cross expert space knight, steadily flew towards the Trost.

Piloted by Venerable Kelvin Praetor, the Trost was a hybrid mech that excelled in mid-range destruction. It possessed a variety of arms that were exceptionally suited to mow down large amounts of enemies.

Up close, the Trost was armed with powerful flamethrowers that could roast any mech at close range into ashes!

The Trost was too tough to be taken down from range with ease. Venerable Linda already recognized that her Amphis was the best mech to fight against the Trost.

The latter expert mech fared much worse against heavily-armored opponents. The Amphis not only possessed exceptional defense, but also possessed means to mitigate incoming heat and energy!

Venerable Imaris Cross targeted the remaining traitor expert mech. His expert light skirmisher rapidly advanced towards the Imperial Verdict, the expert spearman mech piloted by Venerable Albert Praetor.

The Imperial Verdict was a renowned expert mech that had won many duels with its iconic trident and shield.

Not only was Venerable Albert Praetor a master at wielding the trident, the Imperial Verdict also possessed considerably greater acceleration and agility than was typical of a medium mech.

Only a faster mech such as Venerable Imaris' Conavis Mer was capable of keeping the Imperial Verdict busy!

As for winning the duel, Venerable Imaris had no such intentions in mind. Venerable Albert Praetor excelled at 1-on-1 duels, and so did his expert mech!

That left Banner Cross free to choose his opponents. While he wanted to come to the aid of his fellow Crosser expert pilots, he could not ignore the presence of 8 Fridayman expert mechs.

While the standard mechs of the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan were already starting to put a lot of pressure on them, his Leskin was needed to contain the Fridayman expert mechs even further!

As Venerable Banner Cross was about to make his move, he instinctively jerked his Leskin to the side as more than twenty resonance-empowered beams raked the area where his mech had just been!

"Tch!"

If his mech wasn't so mobile and possessed such powerful boosters, his mech would have been struck by the sudden attacks!

The Leskin immediately began to retaliate by firing a beam that struck one of the quasi-expert mechs accompanying the Charlemagne!

"I only have one rifle, but that's enough to teach you a lesson!"

Chapter 2659: High-tier Expert Mechs

At this stage of the battle, the apparent plan of the enemy strike force became clear to Ves and the other leaders.

The enemy split up their fleet in two pincers which slightly arced apart from each other in order to pin the expeditionary fleet down from two sides.

From the orientation of the Golden Skull Alliance, the left side was dominated by the Friday Coalition's elements of the enemy fleet. All of the elite mech units as well as their expert mechs soared forward in an obvious attempt to break through the lines of their opponents with unstoppable momentum!

The Praetor Clan and the Planat Clan took responsibility for the right side. Neither the Larkinsons nor the Glory Seekers were too familiar with the unit composition of the Garlener Clans, but Ves was not too intimidated by the mechs they fielded.

While they were unquestionably up to military standard, the traitor clans were evidently unable or unwilling to bring their crack troops.

"They're seasoned regulars." Major Verle's projection spoke in an appreciative tone. "The mech troops fielded by the Friday Coalition's friends have a stable and reliable quality to them. Their relatively unexciting mechs reflect their stated purpose in battle, which is to form a solid wall and occupy their opponents as much as possible. They aren't shock troops who are needed to breach defenses, nor are they required to outmaneuver their opposition in order to achieve victory in one fell swoop. Look at their overall mech composition. It's largely medium mechs with a modest proportion of heavy mechs sprinkled in. They only have enough light mechs to perform the necessary scouting and interception roles."

He had a good point. Ves had already noted the overall quality and characteristics of the mechs fielded by the Praetors and Planats. It appeared that their commitment to this operation was not all that great.

"Why have they agreed to fight us at all?" Ves frowned.

"Pardon, sir?"

"Think about it. From what I understand of the sordid history of the Becker Tribe, once the Cross Clan lost its ace pilot and had been driven out of Vicious Mountain, the conflict should already be over. The Becker Tribe has lost all of its conquered territories and even gave up its own star systems as compensation. The Praetors and Planats managed to preserve the core of their territories while also cannibalizing the territories that used to be held by the Cross Clan. This is an irreversible outcome. Killing the remnants of the Cross Clan doesn't serve any strategic purpose."

Major Verle followed the train of thought and began to speculate as well.

"Hmmm. I understand. The Praetor Clan and Planat Clan may have succeeded in preserving themselves, but the Becker Tribe is in poor shape. They need to focus much of their energies on preserving what they have. There isn't much of a rationale to finish the job as the Cross Clan is unlikely to make a comeback and is already on its way out of this galaxy."

Ves pointed at the powerful Garlener expert mechs that were about to clash against each other. "Look at them. These arrogant expert pilots are too impulsive and prone to their emotions. I bet they're the ringleaders behind the cooperation with the Friday Coalition. This is all a private action to them. The only soldiers they were able to command are those who are personally loyal to them. This is how expert pilots work in

Vicious Mountain. They have actual autonomy and decision-making power in their star sector."

"That sounds plausible."

They could make good use of these guesses if they turned out to be accurate. If Ves was right about the forces of the two clans, then their rank-and-file shouldn't be too threatening. There was a difference between following orders and fighting for a cause. Perhaps the individual soldiers might harbor some irrational hatred against the Crossers, but now that the main problem had been resolved, it was not worth it to risk their lives to beat down an already fallen opponent.

Ves looked at the moving elements on the map with a hopeful expression. "We don't have to invest too much resources in fighting against the standard mechs of the two clans. We can just rely on the Living Sentinels along with some other perfunctory units to hold back the right pincer with the help of our combat carriers. If it turns out my guess is wrong, our Transcendent Punishers can help hold back the Garleners."

"That's a solid plan, but only if you're right, and that is never certain." Major Verle cautioned. "Still, I'm inclined to believe in you. Only the Fridaymen should be fighting us with the fate of their precious state on the line. We'll definitely need to allocate more forces to prevent them from reaching our ship. The Spirit of Bentheim will certainly be in their sights."

He proceeded to bring these matters up to Colonel Ariadne Wodin and the other leaders. They all recognized that this theory had merit. In particular, the senior officers of the Cross Clan also supported Ves' assertion that the rank-and-file Praetors and Planats were followers.

"It's the expert mech pilots who are truly calling the shots." A Crosser officer briefly explained to them all. "We have identified Venerable Damira Planat and Venerable Albert Praetor among our current opponents. Both of them are most certainly the masterminds behind this private action."

The power that both expert pilots exuded in their expert mechs was impressive. To be honest, the Garlener expert pilots on both sides were on a different level compared to the rest.

This was the power of veteran expert pilots who matured in a volatile star sector!

This was the power of expert pilots who lived in an environment where their kind was revered!

It would have been quite frightening if the Larkinson Clan had to fend off the Erin Tear, the Trost and the Imperial Verdict on its own. Fortunately, the Cross Clan's own

powerful expert pilots kept these powerful machines in place, if only to take revenge on the traitors.

While the situation still looked manageable, that was only the case if the three aforementioned enemies were eliminated or remained locked in combat.

If just one of the powerful enemy expert mechs achieved victory, then a chain reaction would quickly ensue that would spell the defeat of the Crosser expert mechs and subsequently trigger the collapse of the rest of the expeditionary fleet!

"We have to keep a constant eye on these duels." Major Verle wearily sighed. "As long as one of them tilts against our favor, we need to reinforce Patriarch Reginald and his comrades no matter the cost."

The expert pilots from Vicious Mountain truly exhibited a lot of power from the very start!

The duel between Venerable Patriarch Reginald Cross and Venerable Damira Planat was the most eye-catching clash of them all. This was the first time that Ves personally witnessed a confrontation between two high-tier expert pilots and expert mechs!

The resonance meters recorded resonance strengths in excess of 50 laveres between the two powerful expert mechs!

Venerable Reginald Cross held a slight edge as his true resonance levels fluctuated between 55 to 57 laveres.

Venerable Damira Planat was a bit worse off as her true resonance only hovered between 50 to 53 laveres.

Despite this minor disparity, Venerable Damira actually held the upper hand in the duel. The Erin Tear she piloted was an exceptionally tricky weapon master mech that was a nightmare to fight at close range!

The Bolvos Rage piloted by Venerable Reginald Cross was a much more rounded mech. Aside from its external weapons, it also carried a variety of integrated weapon systems.

Ves witnessed the Bolvos Rage launching a volley of miniature missiles at the Erin Tear. The latter mech shot out a small but concentrated volley of lasers from its head, detonating most of the incoming missiles.

Two still went through and exploded a short distance away from the Erin Tear, causing the mech's resonance shield to wobble.

The mech piloted by Patriarch Reginald did not let up on the assault. A pair of shoulder-mounted positron turrets swiveled out and glowed in red before firing a pair of piercing beams at the enemy resonance shield!

At the same time, the Bolvos Rage raised and oriented its wrists and fired a pair of projectiles that quickly fired a couple of plasma bolts!

The Bolvos Rage then lifted its shotgun and fired a blast as it flew closer! The silent but powerful blast easily tore the Erin Tear's already-weakened resonance shield to pieces!

Even though the Planat expert mech lost its first layer of defense, an energy shield appeared fast enough to block the second shotgun blast! While the energy shield immediately destabilized, it had succeeded in its job.

The Erin Tear burst forward and jabbed forward with her weapon configured in the form of a spear!

Patriarch Reginald predicted the attack. His Bolvos Rage had already moved out of the way while putting away the shotgun. Instead, it withdrew a small rod that quickly unfolded in a circle until it formed into a shield!

Ports opened up on the chest and thighs of the hybrid mech. They began to fire small but hard-hitting projectiles that precisely targeted the secondary weapon modules installed on the Erin Tear.

The Planat expert mech did not let the attacks go unanswered. The thick spear in its hands split up in half and turned into a pair of axes. The weapon master mech held them tight and charged them up with true resonance, causing the weapons to be surrounded by increasingly brighter orange glows!

The Bolvos Rage ceased its attacks. Instead, it began to distance itself from the Erin Tear while bracing its circular shield directly in front.

Once the Erin Tear finished charging the pair axes, the mech threw them forward with mighty swings!

The soaring axes spun so fast that they looked like two powerful energy disks as they advanced with speeds far greater than what an ordinary thrown weapon should possess!

The thrown axes reached the Bolvos Rage in no time! One spinning axe impacted the mech's red resonance shield in a mighty collision that would have been deafening if there was any air in place!

The first axe that collided against the mech even had enough energy left over to pressure the energy shield that the Bolvos Rage had already erected!

The second axe didn't even have to expend much effort to get past the energy shield. The already unstable barrier couldn't even prevent the spinning weapon from getting right past and slamming into the solid metal shield head-on with its blade!

A second burst of orange exploded at the collision site!

Due to the Bolvos Rage's preparations, the mech managed to make it out intact, but its foldable shield had been split in half! The hybrid mech threw the ruined defensive tool away and pulled out yet another rod that unfolded in an identical circular shield.

The mech pulled out another shield just in time to block the hammer slamming forward!

The spent axes had automatically flown back to the hands of the Erin Tear before merging together to form a hammer.

While the Bolvos Rage managed to block the attack, the kinetic energy behind it threw the mech backwards in space.

The Erin Tear did not pause and spurred forward with the help of powerful boosters integrated into its frame. The hammer in its hands morphed into a spear with the sharp tip pointed downwards. The weapon master mech instantly jabbed it into a downwards motion, causing it to pierce through the Bolvos Rage's left foot!

"DAMIRA!"

An omnidirectional red blast exploded from the Bolvos Rage, knocking the Erin Tear back!

"Hahahaha!" Venerable Damira Planat laughed as she stabilized her expert weapon master mech. "You're as slow as ever. First blood goes to me, old friend."

"DO NOT CALL ME THAT!"

The center chest plate of the Bolvos Rage parted aside. The weapon port behind it glowed ominously in red before it unleashed a power beam that pierced through the Erin Tear's recovering resonance shield and burned against the shield that the weapon master mech had formed out of the weapons it held!

The duel between the high-tier expert mechs was far from over. The first round was just the beginning. Both exquisite machines carried so much equipment and modules that the fight would not end until one of them exhausted all of their means.

This was not going to conclude in a short amount of time!

Chapter 2660: Rising Casualties

Ves and many other observers couldn't help but admire the performance of the Garlener expert mechs.

He had to admit that Vicious Mountain had turned expert mech combat into an artform. While he looked down on their warrior culture, only such a circumstance was capable of pushing the development of expert mechs to a higher level!

The expert mechs fielded by the rest of the enemy strike force looked like toys in comparison to the Vicious Mountain expert mechs!

Of course, Ves knew that much of that had to do with the relative strength and treatment of the individual expert pilots.

Venerable Brutus Wodin was not only a boy, but also a relatively young expert pilot who had only come into power for a few years.

Venerable Ghanso Larkinson and the other 7 expert pilots deployed by his side weren't truly Fridaymen. As foreigners who were half-conscripted to fight on behalf of the Coalition, they didn't receive the best treatment. They weren't as skilled as true second-class expert pilots so they wouldn't be able to make good use of more powerful expert mechs anyway.

All of this resulted in an obvious disparity between the two enemy forces.

The Fridaymen brought powerful elite mech troops but only paired them up with a bunch of mediocre expert mechs.

The Praetor and Planat Clan were led by a small number of powerful expert pilots but only managed to bring several thousand ordinary military mechs.

The expeditionary fleet did not have to worry too much about the weaker components of the two enemy forces. While that didn't mean that they could be ignored at will, they obviously weren't expected to achieve victory on their own merits as long as they were contained.

Right now, thousands of mechs on both sides have become locked in battle!

Due to the fact the enemy dispatched its forces in two pincers, the Larkinsons, Glory Seekers and Crossers had to split up their forces as well.

As previously agreed upon, the defending mechs on the right side of the expeditionary fleet largely consisted of units that were more suited to slower-paced battles of attrition. While that didn't necessarily mean that the individual officers couldn't employ

unexpected stratagems or pull off clever maneuvers, the overall tone of the battle was relatively subdued compared to what took place on the opposite side.

The exchange of blows was a lot more intensive at the left side of the battlefield!

A flood of laser and positron beams lit up the surrounding space as rifleman mechs from both sides had become locked in battle!

The initial weight of fire clearly favored the elite Fridaymen due to their stronger mechs. The Larkinsons only managed to compensate for the weakness of their Vima Suns by relying on their greater numbers and allowing the Transcendent Punishers to provide some much-needed assistance.

The artillery mechs played a crucial role in suppressing the enemy! The Ylvainan mech pilots had all received orders to concentrate their firepower on the grenade-carrying mechs of the Holvein Grenadiers.

It couldn't be helped! The elite mech regiment founded by the Gauge Dynasty was just too difficult to fight against at close range! A series of powerful grenades could easily tear apart a formation or blow upon a hole in a battle line.

The grenades also induced a lot of fear in any mech pilot that attempted to take down a Holvein Grenadier mech. The elite mech pilots had a habit of holding back at least one grenade until their mech was about to be defeated. The damaged mech would whip out and throw the grenade at its opponent at the final moment before taking advantage of the moment to disengage.

If the nearly-defeated Holvein Grenadier mech was unable to withdraw, then its mech pilot would not hesitate to blow up the grenade at point blank range!

Therefore, the 300 or so Transcendent Punishers that still remained operational all unleashed death and destruction on all 6 mech companies of the Holvein Grenadiers!

While the Grenadiers brought forth plenty of space knights to withstand the barrage, their defenses weren't as perverse as that of the Corundian Giants.

With up to 1200 heavy positron and gauss cannons trained onto the brave space knights of the Holvein Grenadiers, their thick shields melted and fractured into pieces as soon as they were subject to focused fire. The energy shields that formed along the way quickly popped within seconds after blocking over twenty successive beams and rounds at once!

Once the space knights became exposed, not even their thick frontal armor availed them for long. Positron beams vaporized the upper layers while softening up what remained with an excess of heat. Solid gauss rounds fired by the Transcendent

Punisher's potent Xcordon cannons slammed into the already-weakened plates and shattered several of them at the same time!

While a single Transcendent Punisher likely needed a fair amount of time to chew through the defensive layers of a Holvein Grenadier space knight, what about an entire squad? What about an entire mech company?

No single mech could withstand so much firepower at once, especially when they advanced closer!

Dozens of space knights shattered into pieces. Others turned into empty husks as their mech pilots hastily ejected from their machines. Without any significant counter battery fire to worry about, the Transcendent Punishers were performing their jobs in splendid fashion as their heavy firepower literally forced the Holvein Grenadiers to a standstill!

Other defensive mechs hastily reinforced the Holvein Grenadiers, allowing their more fragile mechs to escape the brunt of the bombardment for a while longer.

Of course, the fact that the Transcendent Punishers employed all of their firepower on just one single enemy mech unit meant that the others were able to advance under much less pressure!

The Larkinson rifleman mechs only inflicted light damage onto the enemy mechs. The modified laser rifles of the Vima Suns might be a tad more powerful than the norm, but the powerful armor of their opposition were more than capable of resisting the beams.

It couldn't be helped! The commercial second-class rifleman mechs piloted by the Avatars, Battle Criers, Vandals and so on were only optimized for laser weapons in order to lower costs.

While laser weapons boasted stellar accuracy, their damage potential was disappointing compared to positron weapons. Even when squads of Vima Suns focused their fire onto a single target, it took a lot of effort just to dig into the internals of a tough military mech.

The enemy rifleman mechs did not suffer from the same problem. Many relatively fragile Larkinson mechs lost limbs or suffered severe damage after getting hit a couple times by power positron beams.

The enemy rifleman mechs had no equals on this side of the battlefield! Only the rifleman mechs fielded by the Glory Seekers and the Cross Clan were able to match their Fridayman counterparts blow for blow, but the latter had numbers by their side.

This was because the Glory Seekers and the Crossers had tasked the majority of their ranged mechs with the vital mission of suppressing the Fridayman expert mechs!

Colonel Ariadne Wodin chose to rely heavily on ranged firepower to suppress and constrain the Fridaymen expert mechs. Thousands of rifleman mechs all concentrated their energy beams at the powerful machines. Most of the beams actually went wide because their targets accelerated in unexpected directions, allowing them to evade most incoming fire.

What scattered beams managed to hit the expert mechs were actually scattered by their resonance shields.

The combined firepower of a mech regiment's worth of rifleman mechs weren't even capable of getting past the resonance shields of the enemy mechs!

While the expert mechs did not sustain any significant damage at the moment, it was quite exhausting to maintain their resonance shields. The expert pilots had to invest so much attention to avoiding so much damage that they weren't able to close in on their opponents!

Whenever an expert mech shot forward, the rifleman mechs flew backwards while at the same time directing much more firepower at the closing enemy.

The Glory Seekers and the Crossers also dispatched many melee mechs because ranged suppression was not enough to hold back the enemy expert mechs. These mechs formed into squads and advanced whenever the rifleman mechs halted their fire on a target.

These brief clashes did not end well. In one instance, the Glory Seeker and Crosser mechs that approached an enemy melee mech abruptly lost half their number as a blade extended by resonance slashed across a wide area, thereby slicing the attacking melee mechs without encountering any significant resistance!

This wasn't even the worst that the Fridayman expert mechs could unleash. The Charlemagne and its Scarra calmly took aim before firing 40 resonance-empowered beams at the same time.

40 Glory Seeker rifleman mechs exploded at the same time as they were fatally struck by Venerable Ghanso Larkinson's amazing feat of marksmanship!

Just as the Unit L was about to fire a second time, two different enemy mechs sniped three Scarra mechs at once!

The Star Dancer piloted by Venerable Brutus Wodin managed to fire a powerful beam that instantly tore through a quasi-expert mech. As the rifleman mech flew forward, its multi-rifle fired a steady staccato of gauss rounds that heavily damaged another Scarra mech.

Approaching from the other side was the Leskin piloted by Venerable Banner Cross. The experienced Crosser expert pilot quickly deemed Venerable Ghanso's abnormal entourage to be the most threatening presence on the battlefield.

If Unit L was about to repeat its earlier feat a few times, then the losses to the Glory Seeker and the Crosser mechs would quickly render them unable to hold back the other expert mechs!

Under this desperate circumstance, the thousands of standard mechs were basically trading their own frames in order to consume the energy levels of the enemy expert mechs.

The chances of taking down expert mechs were too low under normal circumstances. They became a lot more vulnerable once they exhausted their reserves, and one of the ways to do that was to force them to expend their energy to fight back against a flood of regular mechs!

Naturally, the Fridayman expert mech pilots weren't blind. As soon as their opponents brought so many mechs to bear against them, they tried their best to link up with each other and combine their powers together.

When an expert melee mech paired up with an expert ranged mech, the combination proved a lot deadlier than if they were separate!

The former perfectly took care of the advancing waves of melee mechs while the latter steadily shot down ranged mech after ranged mech without worrying about interference!

Unit L already established this combination by pairing up the Charlemagne with the Jaenne D'Arc. As soon as Scarra mechs started blowing up one after another, the Jeanne D'Arc instantly propelled forward and chased after the Leskin, which Venerable Foster regarded as the more threatening of the two opposing expert rifleman mechs!

"You take care of that Hexer expert mech yourself!" She told her teammate.

"Who do you think I am?" Venerable Ghanso growled as the Charlemagne along with all of his Scarra aimed at the swift and elusive Star Dancer. "I've demolished a lot more Hexer expert mechs than you!"

Venerable Brutus Wodin felt a fatal threat as soon as over 35 rifles simultaneously aimed in the direction of his mech.

No matter where the Star Dancer attempted to dodge, it could not avoid getting hit! This was because Venerable Ghanso always fired the guns under his control in a box pattern around his target.

Perhaps getting hit a few times was no big deal, but as long as the Star Dancer received damage that impaired its mobility, then the expert rifleman mech was definitely doomed!

Fortunately for him, the Glory Seekers already anticipated this situation. A dozen or so regular mechs darted forth and put themselves in between the two expert mechs just in time!

"For the Superior Mother!"

"Glory to the Seekers of Truth!"

Every mech that had moved to help the Star Dancer blew up or turned into wrecks without fail!

In some cases, the cockpits of the damaged mechs managed to eject without a problem, but over half of the Glory Seeker mech pilots sacrificed their lives for a momentary advantage!

Venerable Brutus regretted his inability to prevent the Hexer mech pilots from dying.

"Your slaughter ends here!"